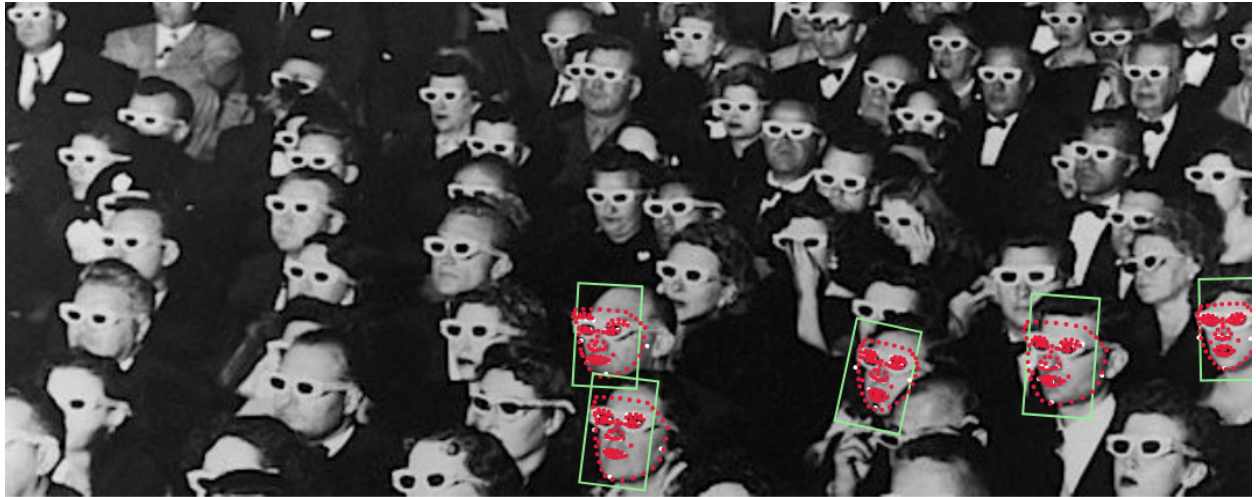


Conference Image Net/Works



Date: 8 December 2018. Location: Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland

Image Net/Works is a conference organised by Lucerne University of Applied Arts and Sciences in collaboration with Fotomuseum Winterthur to tackle issues related to photography's changing role in the context of contemporary political-economic systems.

Photographic media have become central to the productive activities of today's digital economy. Discourses around immaterial and digital labour have attempted to develop new models to address increasingly complex modes of production tied to global digital networks. Various approaches in media theory have explored new forms of photographic production, describing new relations between photographers and the apparatus, as well as images and viewers. The discourse on the changing nature of labour is tightly connected to the role that photographic media, in their algorithmic and networked form, play in a society where information technology has become a dominant force. So far photography has received little attention beyond wider and more general reflections about media's role as digital commodities and the internet as a playground for cognitive labour.

Image Net/Works will attempt to connect these separate but overlapping discourses. The conference will specifically focus on images and the associated economies of looking, producing and sharing. It will investigate contemporary and historical modes of photographic production and

forms of labour that are connected to the computational exchange of pictures, the harvesting of attention, new kinds of image value and photography's various roles in the current economic system.

The conference is an integral part of the SITUATIONS programme at Fotomuseum Winterthur and part of the HSLU Post-Photography research project. It will take place in the context of the exhibition SITUATIONS/To look is to labor (opening 7 December at 6 pm).

situations.fotomuseum.ch
blog.hslu.ch/postphotography

Address:

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**HOCHSCHULE
LUZERN**

Foto_museum

Programme:

7 December, Friday

18:00 opening SITUATIONS/To look is to labor

8 December, Saturday

10:00–10:15 Welcome and introduction

10:15–11:00 Nicolas Malevé, “Machine Glancing”

11:00–11:45 Olga Moskatova, “Living Photographs: On Parasitic GIF(t) Economies”

11:45–12:30 Yanai Toister, “Photography: Love’s Labour’s Lost”

12:30–13:45 Lunch break

13:45–14:30 Rowan Lear, “A Profitable Habit: Photographing as Second Nature and Reproductive Labour”

14:30–15:15 Marco De Mutiis, “The Photographer as Player as Worker”

15:15–15:45 Coffee break

15:45–16:30 Jonathan Beller, “The Derivative Condition”

16:30–17:15 Ingrid Hölzl, “IMAGE-TRANSACTION: The Image as a Lure”

17:15–18:00 Sebastian Schmieg, “Humans As Software Extension”

Abstracts:

Jonathan Beller, “The Derivative Condition”

An anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist revolution must learn how to make its participants the authors of the terms of risk and the architects of the circulation and distribution of the value(s) its movements produce. Such control means securing the content of protest and democratic-liberatory innovation for the protestors, and not, for example, allowing efforts to make social change be reduced to mere content for sensationalist media platforms that secure the world in the hierarchical terms dictated by today's fractal fascism. The old problems of distribution, extraction and accumulation, so familiar to Marxism, still haunt our semiosis, and do so in such a way that their vectors extend into our psyches and metabolism. This essay builds on the notions of informatic labor, informatic racism, computational colonialism and computational racial capitalism developed elsewhere in my recent work to return for a moment to the cinema and, with the ambivalent benefit of hindsight that comes from contemporary conditions of derivative living in a fully financialized world, explore its prior functions and future potentials as a derivative machine. We conclude with the question of derivative communism: are there communist derivatives possible, and if so, what would they look like?

Marco De Mutiis, "The Photographer as Player as Worker"

The recent introduction of Photo Modes in computer games simulates the photographic act of capture and the interface of the camera apparatus within ludic spaces. At first glance this simulation appears to recreate functions and aesthetics of analog photography, reappropriating the semiotics and visual tropes of older media. On the other hand, hidden and invisible mechanics operating within the software of Photo Modes are based on the same algorithms and models that regulate the circulation and exchange of networked images online, following the rules of value of the so-called attention economy. In this networked and algorithmic media landscape, photographic images become seductive baits for human attention, which in turn is commodified, analysed and quantified through informatic models. How is the space for photographic play and labour defined and negotiated in Photo Modes of photorealistic computer games, where images are entirely computationally generated? What is the role of the photographer-player within the global system of networked image production and distribution?

Ingrid Hölzl, "IMAGE-TRANSACTION: The Image as a Lure"

This talk proposes leveraging John Dewey and Arthur Bentley's pragmatist concept of the 'transactional view' (1949), according to which humans and non-humans are considered as parties of 'transactions' or mutual exchanges in a 'larger body of transaction' (somatic, social, cultural, economic). This view can be applied to the status of the image in digital networks: it is equally part of a continuous process of mutual data exchanges between human and non-human partakers in a complex interplay of sensors, antennas, software, hardware, data and user movements. I propose applying the term 'image-transaction' to this particular form of relationality and agency that the image acquires in digital networks. The 'transactional view', itself proto-posthumanist, allows us to address a particular entanglement of the posthuman condition: that of the image and of the human in digital networks, and to forge the hypothesis of the intra-image as the transaction between the representational (on-screen) and the algorithmic (off-screen) function of the image, with the former acting as a 'lure' for the latter. I will exemplify my thesis with an artwork by Julian Oliver exposed as part of the exhibition *Surviving the Glass System: Cinema as Control* (Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2016); in this work, the artist extracted via wifi data (images and emails, mostly) from visitor's smartphones and showed them on a screen, thus turning the on-screen image into a critique of the off-screen image, with the transactional image representing its own entanglement into processes of data extraction and privacy violation. The on-screen image is turned from a place of mystification into a place of lucidity.

Rowan Lear, "A Profitable Habit: Photographing as Second Nature and Reproductive Labour"

In the nineteenth century, the alienated and fragmented bodies of modernity begin to appear in photographs and emerge from behind cameras. The developing practices of photographing produced new gestures, habits and sensory experiences: in effect, constituting a new kind of body. In its industrialised expansion in the early twentieth century, photography sought new markets and new bodies. In the marketing of the monopoly Kodak, photography coalesced in the body of the female consumer, presented as the ideal chronicler of family life and social occasions. Entering the domestic sphere and the workload of the homemaker, mass photography became fundamentally entangled with the unpaid and often invisible work of reproducing life – and therefore sustaining capitalism. Today, while the 'family album' no longer dominates, practices of making, exchanging and consuming photographic images on social media continue to orient bodies towards self-presentation, self-management and a life built on reproducing oneself and others. Aspects of reproductive labour – variously rebranded as affective, cognitive and immaterial - have become key to understanding the dynamics of digital prosumption, in which profit is often extracted from the user's attention, participation and data trail. However, photographic acts have received scant attention in these analyses. Recent photography theory

tends to claim that digital practices have thoroughly disrupted older, stabilised 'analogue' photographic cultures. This paper argues otherwise, proposing that the historically 'feminised' and embodied work of domestic photography lends shape to the character of digital labour in our photographic present. The body of the photographer – the nexus of habit, technicity and patterns of labour – is not merely a product of capitalist practices, but the site from which such practices are reproduced or resisted.

Nicolas Malevé, "Machine Glancing"

Today's digital platforms increasingly rely on Computer Vision algorithm to classify, filter, label, censor, augment and organize their visual content. The recent breed of algorithms performing these tasks are often based on a deep learning framework and their efficacy depends on the quality of their training. In this context, the training consists of feeding a program with huge curated sets of data from which it "learns" regularities. The production of these datasets requires an infrastructure at web scale. A large population of precarious workers, recruited on crowdsourcing platforms, annotate billions of images to describe their contents to machines. In this economy of looking, a certain way of seeing is privileged: the glance. As the cost of gathering annotations is bound to the production rate of the annotators, they are working at a pace that barely allows them to see the images. For the annotators, the glance is the norm, not the gaze. This presentation will address the particular model of vision at work in the industry of machine learning annotation through the analysis of two experiments made by Computer Vision researchers. These experiments have been conducted by Fei Fei Li, the director of the Stanford AI Lab. The first one studies the description of students being exposed to a visual stimulus for less than half a second. The second, conducted a decade later, translates the findings of the former from the context of the lab of psychology to the micro-labour platform. It studies the labels produced by workers when they are shown images for less than 400 milliseconds and the evolution of their error rate. Elaborating on these experiments I will ask questions about the relations between the economy, the retina and micro-temporality, and the visual field this micro-temporal regime establishes.

Olga Moskatova, "Living Photographs: On Parasitic GIF(t) Economies"

In her lecture, Olga Moskatova will explore the parasitic logic of the gift and sharing economy of a particular kind of digital image: the cinemagraph-GIF, or "living photograph". Although GIF (Graphic Interchange Format) is actually a technical term for a digital image format, it is known for its aesthetics and practices of short, animated, and looped moving images which populate the net since more than 30 years and partake in the "participatory culture" (Jenkins 2006). Cinemagraph-GIFs are media hybrids between photography, moving images and internet which are used by prosumers, mass media and advertising. It is distinctive for the "living photographs" to almost completely eliminate the movement of the GIF animation except of small moving details which generate a specific economy of attention. It is this aesthetic economy which I will situate against the background of the gift economy which is regarded to be typical for the participatory culture. Instead of celebrating the latter and opposing it to exchange economy, I will address the deep interrelationship between digital exchange with its forms of "free labour" (Terranova 2004) and gift economy by drawing on Michel Serres' logic of the "parasite" and circulating "quasi-object" (1987). This way, I will discuss the role of attention-grabbing aesthetics for the deeply ambivalent digital economies of participation.

Yanai Toister, "Photography: Love's Labour's Lost"

Disturbingly, one important constituent within the photographic habitus remains conspicuously absent from most discussions in what has come to be called Post-Photography. This particular, which since the late nineteenth-century has routinely been considered focal to the photographic workflow, is the human

photographer. Their trajectory is delineated in this paper; first appearances, rise to prominence and subsequent fall. Throughout, the paper interrogates historical and theoretical definitions of agency in the production of photography to explain why and how we taught ourselves to think of photography as a human-centric form of art-making. It questions the prospects of continuing to think of photography as human-centric, given the altered manifestations of human involvement in most habitats wherein photographic (or quasi-photographic) images are currently being produced and consumed. The paper begins with historical accounts of photography's 'machinism', it then discusses modernist accounts of photography as an act of artistic ingenuity, followed by modalities that have become available through information aesthetics and algorithmic art. It explores technologies like Lytro ILLUM, Dynamic Perspective and Realtime 3D to argue that the full mathematization of photography and its subsequent dissolution as an autonomous medium render the photographic image into a performative system of information exchange. This exists at two levels, subface and surface, purely symbolic and sensory. These qualities necessitate an understanding of photographic production as an open-ended stream of recursive possibilities latent in every image. Therein the part humans play is continually diminishing and limited to the surface of the image alone. In their place a wealth of other techniques, practices and systems now prospers. Where once seen as that element in the photographic process responsible for imbuing the image with artistry, meaning or resistance, the human is these days an increasing burden whose absence altogether simplifies the production of fine-granularity potentially-depictive motile digital environments.

Sebastian Schmieg, "Humans As Software Extension"

While technology is often described as an extension of our bodies, this talk will explore a reversed relationship: bodies and minds of digital laborers (you and me and basically everybody else) as software extensions that can be easily plugged in, rewired, and discarded. I will approach this topic from an artist's point of view. CAPTCHAs as micro jobs for training machine vision (AI), people having to pretend to be bots, APIs for programming people, and gig work in general – we are extending computational systems by offering our bodies, our senses, and our cognition. To some degree, this has been true for most kind of work for a long time. However, with software creeping into every aspect of our lives, and with algorithmic systems modulating and optimizing flows constantly, being plugged in and then generating data, or being modulated by data analysis, has become ubiquitous. In this talk, I will address the condition of being a software extension within the framework of my artistic practice and research by introducing artworks and discussing e.g. the survival creativity of gig workers on hyper-competitive online platforms; the surveilled workplace; AI and machine vision as a global assembly line. Against this backdrop, I will also speculate about possible interventions inside these environments.